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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains descriptions of seven elementary and four secondary alternative school programs in the Eugene, Oregon, School District 4J. All these programs conform to school district policy, which dictates that alternative school programs must cost no more to operate than regular district schools. Each alternative school proposal was developed by staff, students, and parents, and it was reviewed and approved by the board of education prior to implementation. The board's basic policy is that different children learn in different ways, and that the district should, as far as possible, provide a wide variety of educational options for all students. (Author/DS)

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Alternative Schools in District 4J

School District 4J recognizes that no one type of school can be best for all students. To a certain degree, all of the district's schools can be considered alternative schools. Each offers its own special educational option to students and parents. However, in addition, there are a number of programs in the district which have been officially designated by the school board as "alternative schools." In establishing alternative schools, it is the board's belief that different children learn in different ways, that no one single educational approach is the right one for all students, and that providing a large variety of educational options for students and parents helps the district better meet the needs of all its students.

Each alternative school began as a proposal developed by staff, students, and parents for a school with its own distinctive structure and curriculum. Each proposal was reviewed by the board and approved for implementation. One stipulation the board makes for all alternative schools is that these programs must cost no more per pupil to operate than the regular district schools. Also, families are responsible for transportation of their children who wish to attend a school other than their neighborhood school.

Brief summaries of the "alternative school" programs are attached. For additional information, call the contact person listed for the specific program in which you are interested.

Eastside Alternative School

The lower level of Edison Elementary School is home to Eastside Alternative School, where approximately 150 of Eugene's grade schoolers are learning to examine and evaluate ideas, make choices, and accept the consequences of their choices. These students come from all areas of the District; at least 30% of the total number of students enrolled are from outside the Condon/Edison attendance region.

Three important features of Eastside are an individualized curriculum, a nongraded, family-like environment in which cooperation is fostered among students of all ages, and a strong community base.

A steering committee composed of parents and other community representatives serves as the vehicle to involve persons interested in formulating school policies and assisting the administration in making decisions about the operation of Eastside. In addition to committee responsibilities, parents are expected to be supportive of their child's choices within Eastside's unique learning environment. Parents are also encouraged to work closely with their child and his/her teacher in planning how to best pursue educational goals. Conferences involving parents, child, and advisor are therefore scheduled whenever needed. Finally, Eastside parents are asked to contribute to the total school program, either by serving as volunteers in the classroom, by providing transportation, materials and supplies when necessary, or by assisting in some other way feasible for them.

A variety of mini-classes and longer-term classes are designed to cover all areas of the District 4J curriculum. Supplementing these are centers where students may find materials and activity suggestions which allow them to pursue their own special interests.

Eastside students look outside the school for an abundance of learning resources. Not only are they exposed to community members coming into the school, they also volunteer in various social agencies such as the University of Oregon's Clinical Services and the Emerald Nursing Center.

Contact person:

Evie Matthews
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Environmental/Outdoor School

As its name suggests, the Environmental/Outdoor School is designed for those students who seek the kind of learning that can best take place outside the classroom. It is an alternative school sharing the facilities of River Road Elementary School and serves 40 to 50 fifth and sixth grade students.

Part of each day's classes in the Outdoor School closely resemble those of most other fifth and sixth grade classes. The difference is that, as much as possible, classes are organized so that they center around environmental concerns. When the classroom moves outdoors, students are then given an opportunity to apply their academic studies to the environment--to establish a connection between the printed word and the world around them.

A variety of field trips have been made possible by University of Oregon volunteers, students from North Eugene High School's Environmental Studies classes, and parents of the students enrolled in the school. These trips have included many close-to-home sites such as the Willamette River, Spencer Butte, numerous city and county parks, and the recycling facilities of BRING. Field trips of farther distance may include the lava beds of central Oregon, mountainous areas of the Cascade Range, and the marine biology of Cape Perpetua on the Oregon coast.

Parents who choose the Environmental/Outdoor School may be asked to "chip in" or to participate in fund raising activities for overnight Resident Outdoor Schools or field trips that require rental of equipment such as skis or canoes.

Added to the "survival skills" of reading, math, and communication is a fourth--responsibility. The Environmental/Outdoor School is based on the philosophy that crucial to our survival is a deeper understanding of, and a sense of responsibility toward, our natural environment.

Contact person:

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Evergreen Alternative School

Housed in one of six quads at Edgewood School, the Evergreen Alternative School draws 75 students (grades 3-6) from throughout District 4J. Its special features include the following:

- cooperative goal setting by parents, teachers and students
- team teaching
- groupings of students according to skills and needs
- high involvement of parents and community resource people

Evergreen parents sign a contract for the school year, which includes a commitment to contribute at least one and one-half hours each week, helping either at school or at home.

Parents also elect five representatives to serve with two staff representatives on the Evergreen Steering Committee. Through this steering committee, Evergreen has made decision making more democratic and open.

Teacher-parent conferences are frequently scheduled, and written evaluations are sent home at the end of every grading period. In addition, special notebooks containing examples of classwork are carefully kept by students and are shared with parents every two weeks.

Study of reading, math, and language arts often takes place in small groups and is tailored as much as possible to individual needs. A "back-to-back" reading system regularly reduces the teachers' class loads for a time by allowing half of the students to work on individualized learning tasks with parent supervision.

Students are generally with one teacher for no longer than 45 minutes, moving from class to class in much the same way as high school students. Since learning how to make decisions is stressed at Evergreen, every three weeks students are given the opportunity to select classes in physical education, science, and social studies. The themes and foci of these classes may vary, but essential skill development remains the same.

Scheduled throughout the day are activity periods during which students may work on projects they have selected from a list of ideas contributed by both students and teachers. These are high interest activities, and students are permitted to participate only upon completion of academic studies.

Contact person:

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Magnet Arts Alternative School

Art is used as the vehicle through which youngsters at the Magnet Arts Alternative School learn all other subjects. Social studies, writing, reading, arithmetic--all are taught through some form of art, be it music, drama, or painting. And although the 150 students from grades 1-6 who attend Magnet Arts need not be especially gifted, they must all share a special interest in the arts.

The Magnet Arts School is the outgrowth of the federally funded IMPACT Project which was conducted at Edgewood Elementary School for four years in the early '70s. Some of the staff members at Magnet Arts were associated with that program. Each has an expertise in a special field of art in addition to training as a classroom teacher. Every student spends some part of the day with each teacher.

Classes are grouped into two divisions--grades 1, 2, and 3; and grades 4, 5, and 6. Within these groups, children work together in an open structure with team teaching and cross-age grouping. Little emphasis is placed on different subject areas because the philosophy of the Magnet Arts staff is based on the belief that "children understand more when they deal with wholes instead of parts."

Volunteers are important at Magnet Arts; last year over 100 volunteers took part in small group and large group instruction, library work, tutoring, special interest groups, and mini-course instruction. The University of Oregon, located just across the street, provides many resources and people for this program.

In addition to the regular school classes, Magnet Arts students participate in a number of extracurricular activities: a performing dance group, a photography group, a video and film-making group, an all-school chorus, and a drama group. Through a relaxed atmosphere, and through the truth and beauty of art, children at Magnet Arts are learning to better appreciate one another's likenesses and differences.

Contact person:

Gwen Curran
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Patterson Primary Center

Ida Patterson's nongraded primary center provides students and parents with two learning environments from which they can choose.

The first option consists of four homerooms that have joined together to create an "open program" for 100 students: kindergartners, "preprimary" six-year-olds not quite ready for first grade, as well as first, second, and third grade students.

Two homerooms make up the second option within the Primary Center. Called "team rooms," they offer security to approximately 50 students who don't want all the mobility of the "open program."

At the core of the "open program" lies the students' setting of daily and long-range goals. With the exception of times set by teachers for homeroom, reading, and math; the students are free to choose which rooms they will visit each day and during what periods they will visit those rooms. They know that in the "activity room" they can hammer or release pent-up energies; while, depending upon when they visit other rooms, they can learn to play the recorder, independently take advantage of extensive audio-visual resources in the Media Center (which is open all day as a free choice area), bake a pie, participate in improvisational drama, play math games or receive special help in reading.

Family life is emphasized in both the "open program" and the "team rooms." Learning how to use such things as the telephone or laundromat is viewed as a survival skill along with reading and math. A great deal of time is also spent in talking about feelings and alternative ways to deal with conflict situations.

The Primary Center works closely with Patterson's Community School, so parents are strongly encouraged to become involved in its activities, as well as those in the Primary Center. The student/adult ratio in the Primary Center has been kept low because of extensive use of parent, neighborhood and university volunteers.

Parents are kept informed about their children's progress through conferences, regularly scheduled home visits, and regular narrative reports.

Contact person:

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Silver Lea Corridor School

The Silver Lea Corridor School, a school-within-a-school, fills to overflowing one wing--including the corridor--of Silver Lea Elementary School. It is a non-graded alternative program serving 115 neighborhood students from grades 1 through 6. A team of six teachers plan for and teach the entire group.

One member of the Corridor School staff, a paraprofessional, is responsible solely for encouraging parents and community volunteers to accept active roles in all phases of the program. Students, parents, and teachers all make written commitments.

Class schedules change weekly, and with the help of teachers and parents, students select classes they will take and establish goals they expect to meet. These goals must be reached by the end of each week. The frequent change in class offerings creates a wider variety from which students may select their classes, and more opportunity for field trips into the community for increased emphasis on career awareness.

The Silver Lea Corridor School's program has been successful for students at all levels of achievement. By setting their own goals, youngsters may learn within their individual capabilities. Some are locked into a structured plan to meet their goals, while others may work independently toward more indepth study into a subject. Those students who do work independently provide teachers the freedom to give individual attention to others.

One important element in the Corridor School's program is the cooperation between students. Younger students coming into the school for the first time are assigned "Big Brothers" or "Big Sisters," who help ease early adjustment to school. Others work together, sharing expertise and experiences with a casual disregard for age.

Contact person:

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Traditional Alternative School

While the "basic skills" of math, reading, and writing are taught in all District 4J schools, the same teaching strategies are not used in all classrooms. At the Traditional Alternative School, four teachers, 100 students (in grades 1 6) and their parents will come together this fall, not only because they share a conviction that the "basic skills" should receive top priority, but because all share a preference for teacher-directed education.

The school's discipline policy will emphasize consistency, firmness, and high standards tempered by acceptance of the individual child's feelings. The reading program is phonetically based and will be used consistently from one grade level to the next. Classes demand drill, memorization, homework and plenty of testing in the belief that learning is often, but not always, fun.

"Competencies," or statements of teachers' expectations, help parents to clearly understand what their children should be learning in each grade. Moreover, the Traditional School has established a steering committee which gives parents an opportunity to influence the hiring and evaluation of staff, the setting of school rules, the selection of texts, etc. Finally, parents may join staff in annually evaluating the school's progress toward all of District 4J's curriculum goals--not just those in reading and math, but also those in science, art, social studies, etc.

The newest of District 4J's elementary alternative schools, the Traditional Alternative School will be located in the Adams Elementary School building. There, in four adjoining classrooms, the Traditional School staff hopes to create a program that may not be extreme, unique or innovative--but that will be distinct, one more point on District 4J's spectrum of educational options.

As is consistent with District 4J Board policy, transportation to schools other than their neighborhood school is the responsibility of the parents.

Contact person:

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secondary

Jefferson II

Rooted in the honorable tradition of learning by doing, Jefferson II operates as a school-within-a-school at Jefferson Junior High School. It serves 75 students (ages 12-15) who have opted to take three hours at Jefferson II in place of their regular Social Studies and Language Arts courses. The reaminder of their classes are selected from the regular Jefferson curriculum.

Jefferson II's staff provides regularly scheduled "clinics" and special workshops focusing on particular skills and concepts. Students apply what they learn in these sessions to problems that they have chosen to study in small groups. Topics pursued by these groups range from geological formations to play writing, from politics in Portugal to the influence of music on studying.

Jefferson II may soon grow from three teachers to four, from 75 students to 100. In addition to credit in language arts and social studies, an expanded Jefferson II will offer credit in science and electives, making the program a half-time alternative.

The community is Jefferson II's best classroom, with local resources frequently being tapped and students being encouraged to venture off campus. Clearing trails at Spencer Butte park is one example of a project in which Jefferson II students have become involved.

Jefferson II is open to any junior high student in School District 4J. For those who live outside the Jefferson attendance areas, "superintendent's transfers" can easily be obtained by calling Herman Lawson at 687-3453.

Contact person:

George Westergaard
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687-3221

Opportunity Center

The Opportunity Center is a small learning community located in a former warehouse at 1995 Amazon Parkway. It provides an option for 80 eighth, ninth, and tenth grade students who are seeking an alternative to traditional ways of learning and who are willing to take more responsibility for the choices they make.

Students may choose a weekly schedule ranging from 20 periods a week to a full day program every day. Half of the schedule must be from a required list of classes, including all the basic skills, and the remainder may be chosen from a list of high interest elective subjects. New courses are developed each quarter. Course offerings reflect the requests and special interests of students, the availability of teachers and tutors, and the school's commitment to the improvement of a student's basic skills. The curriculum also includes workshops of one or two days, opportunities for independent study projects, and many field trips ranging from week-long wilderness outings to a simple afternoon at the University of Oregon art museum. Recently, the thrust has moved toward environmental education and a greater emphasis on preparation for the world of work and life experiences.

The students at the Opportunity Center share the responsibility for making decisions which affect the entire school community. Town meetings are often called for the purpose of making major decisions, and student committees assume other leadership roles. Weekly business meetings are open to students as well as staff, and many all-school activities and celebrations are held.

Many of the students and staff members feel some of the most rewarding experiences at the Opportunity Center has been spontaneous and informal. The program has been planned openly and flexibly to provide for just such experiences.

Contact person:

Ron Spidell
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Action High School

Action High School reaches beyond classroom walls in an attempt to unbox education. It offers approximately 100 students four clusters of learning opportunities.

The first cluster is commonly known as Action's "community placement program." Through this program, students are able to spend either mornings or afternoons working with community agencies and businesses, such as the Lane County Legal Aid, Bush Animal Hospital, and the American Civil Liberties Union. With the help of these and other community sponsors, Action students are gaining experience in areas as diverse as solar energy research, special education, advertising, and computer programing.

Action's second cluster of learning opportunities is made available in a building which it shares with Lincoln Community School. There, during regular school hours, small classes are offered for students seeking credit in social studies, science, math, career/business education, English, art, environmental studies, and physical education. The use of community resources, guest speakers, and field trips is an integral part of the classes, which are usually kept small. Students with the ability to work independently can do so with the teacher's approval.

The third cluster includes evening classes held Monday through Thursday in various locations throughout the community.

A fourth cluster has been recently added: a series of courses which introduce students to careers available in the forest industry and skills required in many of these careers.

Students may choose any or all of Action's four learning clusters. Although most students decide to attend Action full time, some enroll half-time at Action while continuing to attend their home high school. The length of enrollment at Action may range from one semester to three years.

The program is open to any high school student in District 4J, although junior and senior applicants are given priority.

Contact person:

Gary Craven
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Horizons Secondary School

"We think students should have a lot to say about their own education," insist the proposers of Horizons, Eugene's newest alternative school.

The 20 proposers are themselves students who, during the 1975-75 school year, attended a special daily three-hour class called the "Planning Course." The idea for this course originally came from five student organizers and was approved by the School Board during August 1975. The course culminated in the spring of 1976 with the School Board's approval for a proposal for a new alternative secondary school for 83 students in grades 9-12.

Now at home in a wing of the Frances Willard school building, Horizons is an intimate but challenging community of learners. Horizons students are expected and trained to actively participate in setting school policies, determining which courses should be offered, evaluating the school's success and recommending which teachers should be hired, etc. Many of these decisions are made by seven-member committees, of which four members are students.

Involvement in such decision-making activities is part of the students' work in "law and government," one of five curriculum areas that are emphasized at Horizons. The other four curriculum areas are:

- Outdoor/environmental studies
- Fine arts
- Basic skills (math and language arts)
- Affective education (learning how to identify and cope with feelings, as well as training in how to function effectively in groups)

All of District 4J's curriculum goals are met through exploration of these five areas.

All students select advisors from the Horizons staff, which consists of two full-time teachers, six half-time teachers, and an aide. "Advisor-advisee" groups (usually consisting of one adult and 18 students) not only help to insure a personalized education for each student; they also serve as central channels of communication for the entire Horizons community.

Contact person:

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